

VA Financial Policy  
Grant Funding Availability Announcement Process

CHAPTER 3

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## 0301 OVERVIEW

This chapter establishes Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy for developing and issuing information about funding opportunities under VA discretionary grant programs and the application submission deadlines. This chapter outlines the requirements of the [Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\), Standard Data Elements for Electronically Posting Synopses of Federal Agencies' Financial Assistance Announcements at Grants.gov FIND](#) (standard announcement format), June 23, 2003, and the [Office of Federal Financial Management \(OFFM\), Use of Grants.Gov FIND](#), October 8, 2003, [policy letters](#).

The policies in this chapter apply to all VA programs that award discretionary grants and cooperative agreements. This chapter does not apply to mandatory grant programs or to applications for single-source awards and unsolicited applications.

## 0302 POLICIES

030201 ANNOUNCEMENTS. VA will promote the widest possible dissemination of grants information to potential applicants concerning the availability of funding opportunities. Consistent with the requirements of this chapter, grant offices are encouraged to streamline and simplify the program announcement process to better serve applicants.

030201.01 Issuing Notice and Grants.gov. Competing applications will be solicited using both a synopsis, which will be posted at Grants.gov FIND, and a funding opportunity announcement formatted and issued in accordance with this chapter. Competing applications, which include those classified as “limited competition” (whether the universe of potential applicants is known, e.g., States, or unknown), may not be solicited on any other basis.

The term “funding opportunity announcement” refers to all financial assistance solicitations regardless of type or where issued. The types of funding opportunity announcements recognized for use in VA include Requests for Applications, program announcements, standing announcements, and application guidance. Funding opportunity announcements will be linked to or uploaded in Grants.gov.

A. All funding opportunity announcements will be posted on the internet, regardless of the means of issuance. When multiple media sources are used to disseminate information about funding opportunities, grant offices will attempt to ensure that potential variations in the information provided and the timing of information release do not create an unfair advantage to the users of one medium rather than another.

B. Grants.gov FIND is a government-wide site for posting summary information about funding opportunities. The funding opportunity synopsis at Grants.gov FIND will include a link to (or upload of) the funding opportunity announcement. The synopsis will include

the standard data elements required by the OFFM Policy Letter on use of Grants.gov FIND (dated October 8, 2003) ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants\\_docs.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants_docs.html)).

C. Grants agencies may also issue funding opportunity announcements in other ways including posting on the grant offices's website, publishing in the *Federal Register*, or mailing to all eligible applicants in a universe of known applicants.

D. Grant agencies may use other media in addition to issuance as required by this chapter.

E. If a grant office chooses to publish a notice in the *Federal Register* providing summary information about the funding opportunity, the notice will include the following information about the funding opportunity:

1. *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA) number;
2. Funding opportunity description;
3. Funding instrument type, i.e., grant or cooperative agreement;
4. Direct electronic link to the funding opportunity announcement;
5. Eligibility;
6. Whether there is a cost-sharing or matching requirement;
7. Responsiveness criteria, if any;
8. Evaluation criteria;
9. Due date for applications and other pertinent dates, if applicable, such as a due date for submission of letters of intent (LOIs); and
10. Telephone number(s) and an address for applicants to obtain a hard-copy version of the funding opportunity announcement.

030201.02 Approvals. Heads of the grant offices will name an appropriate staff member to hold primary responsibility for approving funding opportunity announcements and ensure that there is an appropriate level of coordination so the funding opportunity announcement complies with the requirements of this chapter and meets the programmatic needs established within statute and VA policies and priorities.

030201.03 Timing. The process for development of draft funding opportunity announcements should begin early enough in the fiscal year during which awards will

be made (or the prior fiscal year) to allow the grant office to maximize the time available for the applicant to prepare its application and for the grant office to carry out its objective and business reviews and make timely awards.

Grant offices should provide applicants at least 60 days from the date of issuance of a funding opportunity announcement to prepare and submit applications; however, no less than 30 days shall be provided, except in the case of a limited competition for urgent awards, if a full 30 days would adversely affect the project or program and viable applications may be prepared in less time.

030201.04 Technical Assistance. Funding opportunity announcements will be as clear and comprehensive as possible to limit the need for potential applicants to consult with grant office staff. If grant office staff members do provide telephone or other informal consultation, they will provide consistent interpretations and treat all requesters equitably.

030201.05 Clarity and Simplicity. Except for funding opportunity announcements for which a limitation of competition has been approved, the process of developing and issuing a funding opportunity announcement will not restrict competition. Potential applicants will not be given selective advance notification of planned or pending funding opportunities and grant offices will not tailor announcements to selected projects or outcomes, e.g., by using unduly restrictive evaluation criteria.

#### **030202 CONTENT REQUIREMENTS FOR FUNDING OPPORTUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

030202.01 Overview. A funding opportunity announcement is a grant office's formal means of conveying to the public detailed information about the competition for available grant funding. These announcements will be able to withstand scrutiny concerning the fairness and equity of the competition and provide sufficient information to potential applicants to judge whether to submit an application.

030202.02. Template. Grant offices will follow the standard announcement template and content requirements specified in the OFFM Policy Letter on use of a standard announcement format (dated June 23, 2003). The policy directive is part of the implementation of the Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-107). This policy is also designed to further implement the Grants.gov initiative, one of the 24 electronic (E-Gov) initiatives under the Presidents' Management Agenda.

A. For VA, each "Required" section will be included in each announcement and address the considerations specified in the announcement template. Additionally, all section headings will be included regardless of whether the content is "Required" or "Optional." If no content is provided under an "Optional," section, grant offices will indicate "Not Applicable" under the heading.

B. In developing and reviewing funding opportunity announcements, particular attention should be paid to the following:

- Use of the correct CFDA number for the program/project to be funded. Funding opportunity announcements (and synopses) may not be issued without a valid CFDA number.
- If the announcement is expected to result in the award of a cooperative agreement(s), that possibility will be mentioned as well as the type of anticipated substantial Federal involvement. This language should be tailored to the specific type(s) of activities that may be funded under that announcement.
- A clear statement of eligibility, including whether faith-based and community-based organizations and Indian tribes are eligible to apply. Any limitation of eligibility that is not required by statute will be supported by an approved justification signed at the level of the head of the grants office or by another staff member appointed through official delegation.
- Whether or not the applicant will be required to match or share in project costs if an award is made, any application requirements related to matching or cost sharing, and the manner in which proposed matching or cost sharing will be evaluated (e.g., scored evaluation criterion or preference factor).
- Any responsiveness criterion that may be objectively judged for its presence or absence (e.g., page limitation) that will cause a grants office to return the application without review.
- The requirement to include the Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number in the application.
- The required number of copies of the application (for hard-copy submissions), where to submit applications, the medium for submitting applications, and any special requirements for electronic submission, e.g., registration in the Central Contractor Registry.
- The deadline for submitting applications (see paragraph 030203 below).
- A statement indicating the applicability of Executive Order 12372 (Intergovernmental review of Federal programs) and 38 CFR part 40 (Intergovernmental review of Department of Veterans Affairs programs and activities), and additional guidance pertinent to the intergovernmental review process, as appropriate.
- Whether pre-award costs are allowable and the conditions of allowability under 2 CFR Part 220, Part 225, Part 230, 38 CFR Part 43, Part 49, and the FAR 31.205-32.

- Evaluation criteria that will be applied to the review of applications, including whether points will be assigned, and any factors that will be applied in selecting applications for award. If evaluation criteria vary in importance, the funding opportunity announcement should specify the relative percentages, weights, or other means that will be used to distinguish among them (e.g., point values).
- Contacts for further information.

030202.03. Review. In any review of individual announcements or grants office operations, the adequacy of announcements will be judged by the degree to which they comply with the requirements and implementation of this chapter.

#### 030203 DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSION OF COMPETING APPLICATIONS.

A. To be considered timely, applications will be sent on or before the published deadline date. The head of the grants office may authorize or delegate the authority to authorize other ways of determining timeliness, but these requirements will be identified in the funding opportunity announcement.

B. Competing applications, not meeting the deadline specified in the funding opportunity announcement, are considered late and may not be considered. Grant offices are responsible for notifying applicants submitting late applications and either returning the application or advising the applicant of its disposition.

C. The head of the grants office may authorize or delegate the authority to grant a general extension of a published application deadline that affects all applicants or only those applicants in a defined geographical area when justified by circumstances such as acts of God (e.g., floods or hurricanes), widespread disruptions of mail service, or disruptions of electronic (e.g., application receipt services) or other services, such as a prolonged blackout, that affect the public at large.

030204 ASSISTING APPLICANTS. Grant agencies may designate appropriate staff to provide limited technical assistance to applicants in developing their applications. Pre-award technical assistance should be limited to providing:

- Explanations of programmatic requirements, regulations, guidelines, technical evaluation, and funding criteria.
- Guidance to applicants on possible linkages with other resources.
- In appropriate situations, advice on developing the project plan, including setting goals and objectives, task delineation, staffing patterns, scope of services, and program management systems. This type of assistance would normally be

appropriate when it is required to ensure that an adequate number of viable applications are available for review and possible award.

- Information related to the technical requirements of the funding announcement, completing forms, use of Grants.gov, and other information that while publicly available may need limited explanation.

A. If offered, this assistance will be made available to anyone requesting it. In all cases, ultimate responsibility for the quality of the application remains with the applicant. Care will be taken to ensure that the provision of technical assistance is consistent among potential applicants and does not affect the review process for that or other applications.

B. If letters of intent or pre-applications are required, staff may review them to determine relevance to the program announcement's topics, whether any required activities are included, and the conformance of the project plan with program regulations and guidelines. (Letters of intent or pre-applications also may be handled and reviewed by a designated review function external to the grant agency.)

### **0303 AUTHORITY AND REFERENCES**

030301 [Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990](#)

030302 [Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act \(FFMIA\) of 1999 \(Public Law 106-107\)](#)

030303 [Executive Order 12372 \(Intergovernmental review of Federal programs\)](#)

030304 [38 C.F.R. part 40 \(Intergovernmental review of Department of Veterans Affairs programs and activities\)](#)

030305 [2 C.F.R. Part 220 Cost Principles for Educational Institutions](#)

030306 [2 C.F.R. Part 225 Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments](#)

030307 [2 C.F.R. Part 230 Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations](#)

030308 [38 C.F.R. Part 43 Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments](#)

030309 [38 C.F.R. Part 49 Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations](#)

030310 [Federal Acquisitions Regulation \(FAR\) 31.205-32 Precontract Cost](#)

030311 [Office of Federal Financial Management \(OFFM\) Policy Directive on Financial Assistance Standard Program Announcements](#)

030312 [OFFM Policy Directive on Use of Grants.Gov FIND](#)

030313 [OFFM Policy Directive on Financial Assistance Standard Program Announcements](#)

030314 [OMB Circular No. A-11, Preparation, Submission and Execution of the Budget](#)

030315 [OMB Circular No. 136, Financial Reporting Requirements](#)

030316 [OMB Grants Policy Statements](#)

030317 [VA Office of Financial Policy, Publications Library](#)

#### **0304 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

030401 The Assistant Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer (CFO), oversees all financial management activities relating to the Department's programs and operations, as required by the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 and [38 U.S.C. 309](#). Responsibilities include the direction, management and provision of policy guidance and oversight of VA's financial management personnel, activities and operations. The CFO establishes financial policy, systems and operating procedures for all VA financial entities and provides guidance on all aspects of financial management.

030402 Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other key officials are responsible for ensuring compliance with the policies and procedures set forth in this chapter.

030403 The Office of Budget (Budget) is responsible for providing guidance and support to the Department's Administrations and staff offices (e.g., Office of Information Technology and Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction (OALC)) on matters relating to budget formulation and execution. The Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Budget, will request reimbursable authority from OMB to obligate these reimbursements and other income as a part of the annual apportionment or subsequent reapportionment submission. The Service Directors will allot the reimbursements and other income to the program officials, but only if there is reasonable assurance that such items will be collected.

030404 The Office of Finance, Office of Financial Policy (OFP) is responsible for developing, coordinating, reviewing, evaluating, and issuing VA financial policies, including those that impact financial systems and procedures for compliance with all



financial laws and regulations. The Management and Financial Reports Service (047GB) within OFP is responsible for preparing various VA comprehensive financial reports, such as those required by the President and the Executive Branch, including OMB/Treasury reports from the Hyperion (MinX) software. OFP is also responsible for working with the Office of Inspector General's independent contract auditors on VA's annual Consolidated Financial Statements audit and preparing and reviewing Consolidated Financial Statements, Notes and Required Supplementary Information, etc.

### **0305 PROCEDURES**

Refer to section 0302 Policies.

### **0306 DEFINITIONS**

030601 Funding Opportunity Announcement. A grant office's formal means of conveying to the public detailed information about the competition for available grant funding. Refers to all financial assistance solicitations regardless of type or where issued

030602 Grants.gov FIND. A government-wide site for posting summary information about funding opportunities.

### **0307 QUESTIONS**

Questions concerning these policies and procedures should be directed as follows:

Office of Management, Office of Financial Policy, Grants Management Services

### **0308 REVISIONS**

| Section    | Revision            | Office      | Effective Date |
|------------|---------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Vol X Ch 3 | New policy chapter. | Grants Mgmt | May 2012       |